An Exploratory Study on Buyers’ Participation in Reputation Systems
关于买方参与 C2C 网站在线声誉系统的探索性研究

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON
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Abstract

Online reputation systems have been found to be an effective way to ensure honest behavior from sellers in consumer to consumer (C2C) e-commerce. At the same time, reputation systems have been regarded as an important platform where large-scale word of mouth behavior and evaluations of the purchase experience can be communicated. There are altogether two components in online reputation systems: ratings and textual feedback. Thus, reputation systems are often considered to be constituted of buyers’ quantitative scoring and qualitative feedback which offers an important reference to other buyers when deciding whether to buy from sellers or not. Although the importance of reputation systems in the C2C online shopping platform has been confirmed by prior research, little attention has been paid to the motivations of buyers’ participation in reputation systems. The lack of related research may be due to satisfaction in the rapid development of C2C online shopping in the Chinese context, indicating that current usage of reputation systems on C2C platforms is successful. However, with the development of C2C online shopping, both researchers and online buyers have realized that there are problems in the current C2C reputation system, such as overwhelmingly positive ratings and insufficient textual feedback. Some scholars further suggest that the reputation system is unreliable and need to be improved. However, reputation systems’ prosperity and usefulness can not be investigated without buyers’ participation. This research is a step towards analyzing how the buyer perspective can help system designers to form a better concept of more efficient functioning of a reputation system should function. Consequently, research
investigating buyers’ participation in the reputation systems is necessary. The paucity of relevant research has been the main motivation for the study.

Specifically, the aim of this study is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the antecedents and motivation of buyers’ participation in the C2C reputation system after each transaction in the Chinese context. Interviews with online buyers in China have been conducted to help decide the research scope and identify the main antecedents. Based on the theory of conflict handling styles, service quality, and research results from online knowledge contribution and word-of-mouth (WOM) behaviour, a new research framework is developed to explain motivations of buyers participating in C2C reputation systems. In this study, according to the real process a buyer needs to go through, participation in a reputation system has been divided into two segments: indicative ratings and qualitative textual feedback. Within this framework, satisfaction is regarded as the primary antecedent of participant intention. Willingness to submit textual feedback has thus been investigated from two aspects: online knowledge contribution and WOM behavior. Theory of conflict handling styles, including accommodating and avoiding styles, is also expected to have a significant impact on the willingness to give positive ratings, as well as satisfaction.

A survey methodology was adopted in this study, and a total of 269 valid responses have been collected from online actual buyers. The results indicate that satisfaction and conflict handling styles have a significant impact on willingness to submit a
positive rating. The study also confirms that willingness to submit textual feedback can be investigated through WOM behavior and online contribution. This study makes a theoretical contribution to research on reputation systems, for it brings a new angle of view from online buyers, the actual participants in the process. It also offers practical implications for how reputation systems in the C2C online shopping context can be designed more effectively.
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